

HAVE A BLESSED CHRISTMAS SEASON

December 8, 2003 (first published December 22, 2001)(David Cloud, Fundamental Baptist Information Service, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org; for instructions about subscribing and unsubscribing or changing addresses, see the information paragraph at the end of the article) -

I want to take this occasion to bid each of our subscribers a blessed holiday season and a fruitful New Year in God's will. If we can be of any help to you in this coming year, don't hesitate to write. We are very busy, but we try to answer as many e-mails and letters as possible. You are always welcome to write. Even with the deluge of mail I receive, I still answer probably 75% of it.

It seems that each year about this time a number of people write to me and ask my views on Christmas. The subject of Christmas seems to stir up as many strong passions as politics! Some of the angriest, most unkind mail I have ever received (and that is saying something) has been from people rebuking me for having anything good whatsoever to say about Christmas. When I announced recently that the national Christian ladies on the mission field here had some handmade Christmas cards for sale, you should have seen the comments. I was called ignorant, hypocritical, and double minded, and those were the nicest things!

One most gracious Christian gentleman wrote:

"Take me off your list.... I am an ex-Catholic and my wife is also -- from the Philippines! Doubtless you are too stupid to know that worshiping God with Pagan, Dates, Symbols and Rituals does NOT please Him! We stopped 42 years ago - as soon as someone showed us, as Baptists, that it was wrong! How can you miss the encyclopedias, dictionaries, Internet and even God's word - Ex. 32-33, 1 Co. 10:1-5, Jer.10:1-5 unless you are either not saved or wilfully disobedient! No need to answer unless you want to acknowledge just how stupid you really are!"

Consider another sample:

"I read of your complete hatred of the evils of Roman Catholicism -- but you're surprisingly 'silent' when it comes to the real '**demon**' in the room--**CHRISTMAS**. How you can rant against the 'Charismatics'--but not so much a whimper against the abomination of the filthy dreamers who continue to push this 'garbage' of Jesus' birthday on Dec. 25--as being 'truth'! At least when those Charismatics are Speaking in 'gibberish' -- they aren't singing -- "Oh Holy Night--when Christ was born!" Or those silly songs about Away in a Manger--pure speculation and myths! So much for your American styled "Christianity"--full of myths and babblings about **nothing**--every time you sing.

Christmas songs!! The whole Christmas story is purely wives' tales! But who cares? Right?"

These folk have such a winning way, don't they! Some of the brethren have the "gift" of making you want to do the exact opposite of what they are demanding and to run the other way when you see them coming.

We live in South Asia where our missionary work is located, and we do almost nothing for Christmas except to go out to have a nice meal and when our kids and grandkids are here we have a family get-together.

When it comes to Christmas, like on many things, my position doesn't fit neatly into one category. On one hand, I fully understand and am very wary of the pagan and Roman Catholic aspects of Christmas. I also despise the gross commercialization and Hollywoodization of it. On the other hand, I enjoy some aspects of the Christmas season (at least I did when we lived in the States), and I don't think there is anything wrong with singing Christmas carols, as long as they are Scriptural (and many aren't), and enjoying the many social blessings of the season, even exchanging gifts, and participating in other innocent ways with the occasion.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Christ. It refers to Christ's mass, which obviously has a Roman Catholic origin. Catholics observe it on December 25, and Orthodox observe it on ----. The practice was popularized by the Catholic Church, and like many other Catholic traditions, it was adopted from paganism; in this case, from the pagan mid-winter solstice marking the turn of the year. The following is a brief overview of its origin:

"Saturnalia extended from December 17 to 24 and in A.D. 274 the emperor Aurelian made December 25 a feast of the invincible sun. January 6 was sacred to Dionysus. With the toleration of Christianity under Constantine, both December 25 and January 6 became Christianized feasts (Christmas and Epiphany, respectively). Symbols, originating largely from classical or Teutonic-Celtic paganism, such as lights, greenery, and special foods, gradually became associated with Christmas, as did St. Nicholas, whose feast on December 6 had been a time for giving gifts, especially to children" (*New 20th-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, pp. 181,182).

The Encyclopedia Britannica adds:

"In the Roman world the Saturnalia (December 17) was a time of merrymaking and exchange of gifts. December 25 was also regarded as the birth date of the Iranian mystery god Mithra, the Sun of Righteousness. On the Roman New Year (January 1), houses were decorated with greenery and lights, and gifts were given to children and the poor. To these observances were added the German and Celtic Yule rites when the Teutonic tribes

penetrated into Gaul, Britain, and central Europe. Food and good fellowship, the Yule log and Yule cakes, greenery and fir trees, and gifts and greetings all commemorated different aspects of this festive season. Fires and lights, symbols of warmth and lasting life, have always been associated with the winter festival, both pagan and Christian. Since the European Middle Ages, evergreens, as symbols of survival, have been associated with Christmas. Christmas is traditionally regarded as the festival of the family and of children, under the name of whose patron, Saint Nicholas (q.v.), or Santa Claus, presents are exchanged in many countries.”

All of these things can still be observed in some pagan religions. For instance, in Hinduism, there is a festival of lights in early winter that features bright lights, special foods, the giving of gifts, and the alleged visitation of a goddess who bestows blessings on those who are good, etc.

The Santa Claus observance is a Roman Catholic/pagan myth. The *Catholic Pocket Dictionary of Saints* has this to say about “Saint” Nicholas:

“His popularity, already great, increased enormously in the West when his relics were brought to Bari in 1087, and his shrine was one of the great pilgrimage centers of medieval Europe. He is the patron of storm-beset sailors (for miraculously saving doomed mariners off the coast of Lycia), of prisoners, of children ... which led to the practice of children giving presents at Christmas in his name and the metamorphosis of his name, St. Nicholas, into Sint Klaes, into Santa Claus by the Dutch. It should be noted though that the figure of Santa Claus is really non-Christian and is based on the Germanic god Thor, who was associated with winter and the Yule log and rode on a chariot drawn by goats named Cracker and Gnasher” (*Dictionary of Saints*, pp. 369, 370).

God’s people are plainly warned to beware of philosophy, the tradition of men, and the rudiments of the world which are not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

We unhesitatingly reject the paganism of Christmas. I grew up in a Christian home but was taught as a child that Santa Claus is real. I remember how shocked and sad I was when an older cousin told me that it was a myth! It is a great error for believers to participate in such things. Our children have never believed in Santa Claus; we have never had Santa’s image in our home. I won’t even buy wrapping paper with a Santa image. I believe that Santa Claus is idolatry. A couple of years ago my wife met a Hindu woman in Nepal who thought that the Christian’s God is Santa Claus and that Santa Claus had a son who is the Christian’s Savior. Sadly, for many professing Christians, that is probably close to the truth; because they glibly and mindlessly follow such pagan traditions.

As for the Christmas tree, some have tried to intimate that Christmas trees are condemned in Jeremiah 10:2-5, but I think that is nonsense. Jeremiah 10 is condemning idolatry, and

I don't know anyone who makes an idol of a Christmas tree. An idol is something used to portray God, but I have never heard of a Christmas tree being used in such a manner. At the same time, I personally believe it is strange to see Christmas trees and such things set up in churches. At least in my estimation, that is a step toward Catholicism. One might as well get some crucifixes and pictures of Jesus and a Mary with a halo to put alongside of it!

Christmas itself really has nothing to do with the Bible. Christmas is not Christ's day. The first day of the week is the Lord's Day, the day of His resurrection, and it is the only special day God has given Christians. We are specifically commanded to honor Christ's resurrection. As for His birth, the Bible is silent about honoring it in some special way.

Someone protests, "That is the point; the Bible doesn't say anything about it." True, but the Bible also doesn't say anything about *not* doing something in honor of Christ's birthday. When the Bible is silent, God's people have liberty to follow the personal leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14). We are not free to make laws for others *in such matters*, and we are also not free to judge others.

Christmas is also a good time to witness for Christ. Most people even in North America do not know the true gospel, and Christmas can be a good occasion for explaining who Jesus Christ is and why He came into the world. Many people will go to church at Christmas time who never darken the doors other times of the year. At this time of the year, scriptural churches will focus *not* on the birth of Christ, but on preaching the cross. This is also true for the Lord's work in many places overseas. Hindus, for example, know that Christmas is a special "Christian festival" of some sort, and oftentimes they are more open on such occasions to attending church meetings or going to believers' homes. There is less stigma among their Hindu friends about mingling with Christians on such occasions. We have a special evangelistic meeting every Christmas and hundreds of Hindus have heard the gospel through this means who probably would not otherwise have attended church.

Wise Christians can spend less time "bah humbugging" Christmas and more time using these things for the gospel's sake.

Dear Christian friends, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Avoid evil, but enjoy your freedom in Christ during the Christmas season. If your activities are not condemned in the Scriptures and you have a clear conscience before the Lord (Rom. 14), you are free to enjoy yourself.

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord;

and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks” (Romans 14:4-6).

And guard your spirit. Don't get the devil in your trying to get the devil out of others!

James 3:13-18 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. 14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. 15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

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